

Service Area Plan

Department of Social Services

General Relief (49101)

Service Area Background Information

Service Area Description

This service area is responsible for the cash assistance and services offered to no income and extremely low-income individuals served through the Commonwealth's General Relief Program (GR). GR is an important component of the Commonwealth's social safety net as it serves single individuals and families excluded from participation in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and often not qualified for Medicaid. GR is funded by state and local funds and participation is optional for localities.

Participating localities choose among various program components including assistance for medical or dental services, burial assistance and financial assistance to unattached children. GR is financed through State (62.5%) and local (37.5%) funding, and each locality determines how local funds will be used for components they elect to provide to individuals. Agencies may use 100% local funds to meet additional needs. Of the 120 local departments of social services, 103 operate one or more components of the GR program.

Service Area Alignment to Missio

By assisting needy individuals, the General Relief program assists individuals in triumphing over poverty and shaping strong futures for themselves, their families and communities. The GR program provides assistance to low-income individuals with few other services or resources available to them, assisting each individual to meet their basic human needs and rebuild their lives. This assistance often helps those served avoid the unfortunate trade-off between housing, food and medical care.

Service Area Statutory Authority

The Code of Virginia, Section 63.2-802, provides the legal base for this GR program which states that a local board shall exercise its option to establish a program of general relief. A person shall be eligible for such components of the general relief program as the locality chooses to provide if (s)he is in need. Prepaid funeral expenses, which do not exceed an amount established by the State Board of Social Services, shall not be considered a financial asset in determining a person's eligibility for general relief.

Service Area Customer Base

Customer(s)	Served	Potential
Federal agencies (Potential Unlimited)	6	1
Low income individuals and families	150,000	254,000

Anticipated Changes In Service Area Customer Bas

From 2000 to 2003 (most recent Census data), the number of Virginians living in poverty increased 28% with 740,000 Virginians now living below the federal poverty threshold. The confluence of this increase in poverty, the aging baby boom cohort who no longer have dependent children at home, the continual decline in employer-paid health insurance, and the natural (inflationary) increases in the costs for goods and services (including medical and burial services) are likely to create additional demands for the financial support and services offered through the General Relief Program.

Service Area Partners

Federal government

Local Departments of Social Services

State agencies

Service Area Plan

Department of Social Services

General Relief (49101)

Service Area Products and Services

- Support of organizations serving communities
- Economic assistance to low income families/individuals or nutrition, child care, health care eligibility, and financial assistance to low income families/individuals
- Financial support for children
- Burial assistance for the deceased individual
- Financial assistance for an individual awaiting SSI approval

Factors Impacting Service Area Products and Services

Limited funding inhibits the capacity to provide a consistent level of service to low-income Virginians across the Commonwealth. Having different localities offer different levels of service is confusing for the public and customers and raises issues of equity. Additionally, localities often exhaust their funding before the end of the year, fostering a first come, first served culture of service delivery in the community.

Anticipated Changes To Service Area Products and Service

The Department is embarking on a more aggressive SSI Advocacy initiative to facilitate more GR recipients' successful enrollment into SSI. When enrollment is successful, the Social Security Administration will reimburse the Commonwealth the cost of the cash assistance payment made during the time the applicant was awaiting a determination for eligibility into the SSI program. This effort may help stretch the scarce resources available for the program. Additionally, the social services system – state and local departments of social services – will be completing a business process re-engineering initiative in August 2005. This initiative is designed to map the current business processes, recommend radical change to the processes and business model in order to improve client service and efficiency, and post a roadmap for implementation. The results of this initiative will likely change the manner in which the General Relief Program is implemented.

Service Area Financial Summary

Funding for the General Relief Program is financed by state (62.5%) and local funds (37.5%). Only the general fund is appropriated in the state budget.

	<u>Fiscal Year 2007</u>		<u>Fiscal Year 2008</u>	
	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund
Base Budget	\$4,611,421	\$0	\$4,611,421	\$0
Changes To Base	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
SERVICE AREA TOTAL	\$4,611,421	\$0	\$4,611,421	\$0

Service Area Plan

Department of Social Services

General Relief (49101)

Service Area Objectives, Measures, and Strategies

Objective 49101.01

Improve and increase access to General Relief (GR) services

One of the core components of the General Relief program is cash assistance paid to needy individuals awaiting their Supplemental Security Income (SSI) eligibility determination which is a complicated and labor intensive process for applicants. Through an aggressive SSI advocacy initiative, local departments of social services can assist GR clients in successfully navigating this SSI eligibility process and become enrolled in a program better suited to their needs and which pays a much greater monthly benefit. Additionally, the Commonwealth is reimbursed an amount equal to the GR cash assistants payments made while waiting a determination. These funds can be used to provide assistance to additional individuals and families.

This Objective Supports the Following Agency Goals:

- Enhance the independence, well-being and personal responsibility of customers
(This objective is directly aligned with Objective 1.3 of the strategic plan, Improve and Increase Access to High Quality Services and Support. The objective also supports the Council on Virginia's Future long term objectives to "[i]nspire and support Virginians toward health lives and strong, resilient families" by helping meet low-income Virginians basic human needs and freeing up scarce resources to be focused on nutrition and medical services.)

This Objective Has The Following Measure(s):

- **Measure 49101.01.01**

Individuals receiving General Relief who become enrolled in Supplemental Security Income

Measure Type: Output

Measure Frequency: Quarterly

Measure Baseline: New measure, baseline data not available. Baseline will be established using FY06 data.

Measure Target: Specific target will be determined once baseline is established.

Measure Source and Calculation:

VDSS reports to the Social Security Administration

Objective 49101.01 Has the Following Strategies:

- Revise the GR policy and policy materials.
- On-line application.
- Institute an SSI advocacy initiative.